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ABSTRACT

Educators must take into account the changing social, cultural, and economic trends contributing to high absenteeism and dropout rates. No curriculum can succeed if students are not in attendance to learn, develop, and advance in society. This paper evaluates the researcher's computerized system to track student attendance and prevent unexcused absences and selective class cutting. The practicum's success was measured by the attendance computer's accurate monitoring and subsequent reduction of the daily absentee rate. The target school was a central east coast Florida high school situated in a highly transient area dependent on the space industry, citrus farming, and tourism. These occupations produce a significant amount of job-related stress affecting students' home life and attitudes toward school. After implementing the current research-based accounting system with the use of a personal computer, scanning machine, and appropriate software (Dbase and Report Writer), a Quality Circles team was formed to evaluate the system's effectiveness. Findings showed that only 8.5 percent of the students missed more than one class period daily. The total daily absentee rate for the semester was reduced from 16 percent to 6.1 percent. The report includes 6 graphs, 24 references, and 3 appendices containing a sample leadership evaluation form, an attendance roster form, and an admit slip. (MLH)

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DEVELOPING A PROCEDURE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

by

James L. Hernan

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A Practicum Report
Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education at Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

September 1991

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Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. When it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Signed _____

James L. Hernan

Abstract

Developing a Procedure for Accountability of Student Absenteeism.
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Descriptors: Absenteeism/Truancy/Senior High School/ Causes of Tardiness/Attendance Computer Software/ Dropout Prevention/

The author developed and implemented a computerized attendance system to track student attendance and prevent unexcused absences and selective class cutting. Success of this Practicum was measured by the accurate measurement and subsequent reduction of the daily absentee rate as monitored by the attendance computer.

A target school located on the central east coast of Florida was selected. The school is situated in a highly transient area due to employment related to the space industry, citrus and tourism. These occupations produce a significant amount of job-related stress under which many households function. Both parents work in many cases, and the latch-key situation is very common. Many students bring the tension of home life with them to the school.

After implementing the current accounting system with the use of computer and scanning machine it was verified that only 8.5 percent of the students missed more than one class period per day. The total daily absentee rate for the semester was clearly documented at a rate reduced to 6.1 percent.

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Chapter I

Purpose

The education of today's children in the American classroom is the foundation of tomorrow's world. Children are our most precious resources because they are the future. Our forefathers felt that education was and would continue to be the cornerstone of our advancement. Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to a friend, wrote that a "nation that hopes to be ignorant and free ... hopes for something that never was and never will be."

Our educational system must take into account changing social, cultural and economic trends to continue the advancement of society. The American educational system has wandered from the Deweys to the Skinners to the Blooms and from the philosophy of the Progessivist to the Perennialist. As the philosophy and curriculum changes over time one common factor remains. That common factor, no matter what philosophy

or direction is prevalent, is that a student must be present for education to take place.

School dropout rates hover above 25 percent nationally and exceed 50 percent in many of the nation's urban centers. This problem is particularly acute among disadvantaged, minority youth but it also affects all social and economic classes. Neither the dropout nor the process of dropping out are well understood. On the basis of inconclusive evidence, educators, as well as others, assume that dropouts dislike and voluntarily reject schools. The trends in education must address high absenteeism and dropout rates. Whatever curriculum is being implemented will be futile if students are not in attendance to learn, develop and advance society.

A target school located on the central east coast of Florida was selected. The school is situated in a highly transient area due to employment related to the space industry, citrus and tourism. These occupations produce a significant amount of job-related stress under which many households function. Both parents work in many cases, and the latch-key situation is very common. Many students bring the tension of home life

with them to the school. Student enrollment consisted of 1455 students in grades nine through twelve. Five administrators, 90 classroom teachers, four guidance counselors, and the clerical personnel comprised the staff. The school is situated on 52 acres and is actually two campuses merged together which creates some communication and student-monitoring problems. The student enrollment consisted of: 40.1 percent White female, 41 percent White male, 7.4 percent Black female, 7.5 percent Black male and 4 percent others.

The writer is a classroom instructor who has taught for 14 years and has been associated with extra-curricular activity from coaching of athletic teams to sponsoring of clubs and class organizations. The writer has attended graduate school in business and is currently completing a Masters Degree in Education. Also, the writer has spent time in the business sector supervising and managing personnel for five years. Having experiences in both the preparation of students in the school setting and managing in the business world, the writer has a strong interest in the development of each and every student. The writer feels that to teach and prepare students for life after

schooling the increased rate of absenteeism must be addressed and reduced to advance education and the individual pupil.

In an article published by Fredrick, Walberg and Rosher (1979), the authors researched the effect of actual in-class learning on achievement. The authors concluded from their intervention that a positive correlation exists between attendance and learning. Lower rates of classroom time lost resulted in higher achievement. While the conclusion is credible, many weaknesses existed in the author's procedures. It is questionable whether a true random selection occurred and whether the gathering of data was reliable. However, student attendance and involvement in the classroom learning situation has been a point of concern in the past and remains an area of concern presently.

To promote the classroom learning situation students must be involved through their presence in the classroom. First, a systematic method to encourage and guarantee student attendance accountability is necessary. This need is not localized in the target school but is universal throughout systems nationally.

Both rural and urban settings are experiencing similar upward trends in absenteeism. High absenteeism can be the initial indicator of a potential dropout. Recent studies (Zafirau, 1987) are indicating that schools perceiving dropouts as being similar reflects that educators and their schools need an in depth examination into absenteeism and the methods to correct the trend. To indicate the gravity of this situation nationally, 42 percent of the New York City high school students dropped out before graduation in 1988 (Herbert, 1990). In Corpus Christi Independent School District in Corpus Christi, Texas, they lost more than 1,100 students in grades 9 through 12, a number almost equal to the enrollment of one of the system's five high schools (Banks, 1997). Chicago public schools in 1989 reported a dropout rate of 45 percent and a rate of 40 percent of high school students failing two or more courses a year. It should be noted these statistics are based on an enrollment of over 420,000 students. Also on any given day, 45,000 Chicago public school students - one in nine - are absent (Newsweek, 1988). Absenteeism has a direct correlation to dropout rates and student retention. A dropout as defined by

the target school district is a "student who leaves school for any reason except death before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another public or private school or other educational institution."

In the target school a policy exists that excessive unexcused absenteeism automatically results in a grade of "failure due to absence". Unexcused absence is defined by the Board of Education of the target school as absent without a parent, physician's or administrator's permission. After five unexcused absences in a six week grading period the failure grade applies. On a semester of 18 weeks the failure grade takes affect after 10 unexcused absences. Under the existing attendance records system the school was not aware of excessive absenteeism until the student had exceeded the maximum days. This was due to a lag of two weeks or more for inputting into the school attendance computer and lack of periodic review by any school administrator.

The target school was experiencing an unacceptable 16 percent daily absentee rate. This figure was from daily attendance forms submitted to the attendance

clerk at the target school. The 16 percent absent rate was based on the number of students missing one or more class periods in a school day. The state education guidelines stipulated that if a student attends one class in a school day then that student is counted as present. This is further defined as stating that if a student attends class, no matter how long, the student is tardy not absent. If a student enters class with one minute remaining in that particular class then the student is present for that class. Consequently, attendance must be taken or adjusted at the end of class.

A review of this problem with other schools indicated that accountability of absences was not an isolated problem but was instead a universal dilemma. School A, a secondary school of similar enrollment (1300 students) with grade 10 through 12, was also experiencing an absentee problem with a 14 percent rate. School B with a student population of 600 students in grades 9 through 12 related that they had a 10 percent absentee rate.

WHAT IS: The target school has a 16 percent absentee rate, based on an enrollment of 1455 students

that means 233 students were absent from class each day.

WHAT SHOULD BE: A rate of 12 percent, initially, would be a more acceptable rate with only 175 students out of the classroom.

DISCREPANCY: A reduction of four percent in the daily absentee rate at the target school.

This situation presented a need for a procedure to control and monitor the students' in class attendance. To reduce this discrepancy it was necessary for the writer to enlist the support of fellow educators, office attendance clerks, computer software and usage and administrative support. This required the writer to provide leadership, critical thinking and knowledge to achieve an efficient and current procedure of accounting of students.

The purpose of this project was to design an accountability procedure that will identify a selection of students who avoided specific classes as well as those who regularly avoided entire school days. The identification of these students at an earlier time frame enabled the school personnel to reach specific

individuals and identify the problem or reason for absence prior to the student's "failure by absence".

OBJECTIVE ONE: At the conclusion of a semester of implementation of accounting procedure to monitor the absentee rate of the target school for one or more class periods on a daily and weekly basis, attendance of the entire student body would result in a reduction of four or more percent absenteeism.

OBJECTIVE TWO: During implementation at least three recognized critical thinking strategies will be demonstrated.

OBJECTIVE THREE: The writer's leadership style was critical to the success of this practicum - feedback from the Quality Circles Group on the effectiveness of this writer's leadership was considered a positive growth experience. It was expected that this writer would receive at least a three rating on a five point leadership evaluation survey utilized by this writer (See appendix A).

Chapter II

Research and Solution Strategy

Research

In September 1989, the President and the nation's governors held what they called an "Education Summit" in Charlottesville, Virginia. One of the seven major goals was the reduction of the dropout rate and an accountability of student progress (American Association of School Administrators, 1990). Student absenteeism has become a concern of educators.

Also, a 2-year study of student absenteeism by the National Institute of Education (DeJung and Duckworth, 1985) concluded that attendance records are neither accurate nor consistent from school to school. High absence students accounted for 84 percent of all grade point averages below 1.5 and 85 percent said they would be satisfied with a C or D grade compared to 50 percent of the students with fewer absences. Accurate and prompt accounting of students is necessary to improve academic performances.

According to an Indiana University study of absenteeism (Truax, 1985) a combined effort of school personnel, parents, students and community must be involved in developing a program to reduce absenteeism and policies be specifically directed toward habitually absent students.

Reducing absences is the most readily available strategy that high schools have for reducing the number of dropouts. From a survey conducted by the University of Oregon in 1988 (DeJung, 1988), responses indicated two-thirds of the eventual dropouts were identified by 10 days or more of absences in their freshman year.

In Cleveland (Ohio) Public School a study (Zafirau, 1987) concluded that attendance improvement strategies will be most successful if they are addressed immediately and include positive motivators not only to attend school but also to do well academically.

A major concern in analyzing the process of collecting data was the amount of time between the day a student was absent and when the absence was recorded into the attendance program. The time lag was a prime obstacle to addressing or identifying problems before

the situation was no longer controllable. If a procedure could be implemented that would assimilate attendance data in a short time frame then an effective reduction of the absenteeism rate could be accomplished.

School A, a school of equal size to the target school, had developed a procedure which addresses the absenteeism problem for their particular needs. During first period all teachers record all students who are absent. This list is then forwarded to the attendance office at the end of first class period. Each list is put on a scanner type bubble sheet for immediate tabulation. Next, a list of all students absent from the first class period and any students who entered school late is circulated to all classrooms. During the remainder of the school day all teachers record attendance in each class, noting those students who are absent and are not listed on the absentee list and students who are in attendance who are on the absentee list. This discrepancy list may be confusing to some teachers which could create difficulties later. Under this system, the procedure for students arriving late to school is for the student to report to the Dean's

office to receive a class admission slip. The slip is to be presented to the student's teachers to indicate the student has officially reported to school. School A believes this system accounts for all students and forces or encourages students into the classroom.

School B, with a student population one half that of the target school, has a somewhat different system. Attendance is recorded first period in the same manner as described for School A. However, subsequent class attendance is tabulated and a discrepancies list includes two columns. One column is a list of students who are not on the absent list and are not in class and the second column includes students who are in class and are on the absent list. This list is turned into the attendance office at the end of the school day.

In exploring other studies of attendance procedures on a national level, a Carson City high school in Nevada (Slaby, 1983) established a five chronological step system to provide attendance updates during the day.

1. Compile a first period attendance list.
2. Entering absences into the computer and call parents to confirm absences.

3. Teacher list of period absenteeism.
4. Notifying parents about possible truancies.
5. Requiring an admit slip when a student returns from the absence.

Another interesting investigation into absentee accounting procedures was conducted in six urban high schools in the Northwest part of the United States (Duckworth and DeJung, 1986). They identified four major procedures:

1. Monitoring and recording attendance
2. Excusing absences
3. Imposing penalties for unexcused absences.
4. Intervening in patterns of chronic absences.

The evidence suggests that a centralized computer system for monitoring and recording attendance should be combined with school-based microcomputer system for short-term monitoring and feedback.

A report from the New York City Board of Education recommended that attendance procedures is the primary goal to reduce dropout and assist at-risk students (Heffez, 1981). Implementing a uniform computerized attendance system with scanning machines is necessary.

A survey conducted in Indiana School Districts (Englander, 1986) determined that schools are not equipped in either organization or effective strategies to work with alienated students. Others have suggested that schools need to develop a system for monitoring and treating truancy. Evidence indicates that skipping and cutting are serious problems among portions of the students in the schools studied. Boys skipped more frequently than girls, and skipping was most frequent among 11th and 12th graders (Duckworth and DeJung, 1986). Student questionnaires indicated the biggest reason for skipping whole days was that students needed to be at home or had something better to do. Selective cutting was most often due to dislike of a particular class or not having completed homework assignments.

In examining other methods in addressing the absenteeism problem a Santa Maria Police Department, School District and Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department (1983) carried out an unannounced sweep of truant students to improve attendance. There are 3600 students attending two high schools. On the first sweep in October, 29 students were picked up and detained. In December a second sweep netted only 18

students. On the day of a sweep, assistant principals from each school were on duty to identify students and telephone their parents to come and get their sons or daughters and return them to school. Granted, this is traumatic for both students and parents but does appear to be working with only 10 students detained in their third sweep. Truancy sweeps may not be the entire solution but has, in this situation, improved attendance and communications between the parents, school and community.

Another attempt at sweeping was conducted at Sweetwater Union School District, Chula Vista, California (1982). Law enforcement officers from surrounding areas joined the local school district in conducting spot sweeps at various locations. Approximately 273 students who should have been in school were apprehended and taken to a receiving center and returned to their parents. Results were positive in that attendance improved by 6.7 percent and vandalism, burglaries and car theft decreased during the hours of eight a.m. and two p.m.

Another unique effort in attacking absenteeism is sending weekly attendance mailer letters to parents of

students with irregular attendance patterns. This was attempted in 22 high schools in Detroit, Michigan. It was concluded that attendance mailer letters are not very effective in reducing school truancy but are an effective means of communicating with parents (Moore, 1985).

Another component that must be deliberated in this practicum is leadership strategies. Leadership is the activity of influencing people to strive willingly for group objectives (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1983). It is influencing people to follow in the achievement of a common goal. In any situation in which someone is trying to influence the behavior of another individual or group, leadership is occurring. The group that provides for creative growth of the individual or group, is one where inherent satisfactions are often greater than the outward rewards. The individual in this type of group is too busy applying his creative energies to a job or purpose to watch the clock. He becomes totally involved in the task at hand. A person with this goal in mind actualizes his own creative potential as well as the group's, effectively using his external resources and making something happen within

the group. The incorporation of a group, such as a Quality Circles Group, in the decision-making process enhances the situation, and helps insure that a more efficient and effective program might be established.

Referring to the situational leadership according to Hersey and Blanchard, leadership behavior can be analyzed into four groups: telling, selling, participating, and delegating (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). Telling provides specific instructions and close supervision. Selling emphasizes the explaining of decisions and clarifications. Participating shares ideas and facilitates the decision-making process. Delegating involves turning over the responsibility for decisions and implementing those decisions.

The final aspect in researching information for this practicum dealt with critical thinking. Facilitators should be ready to try a range of different approaches. Given the diversity of learning styles, it was important that facilitators vary their method and approach (Brookfield, 1988). They must make every effort to individualize their effort where appropriate. Sidney Parnes has the incorporated creative problem solving model (Parnes, 1972).

Brainstorming is a procedure of encouraging the participants to think of as many varied ideas as they can. The purpose of brainstorming is to reward originality of thought or ideas in order to finalize solutions to a defined problem.

Solution

It is obvious from the President of the United States to almost every school district that absenteeism and dropout rates are critical areas that must be addressed. This writer, after carefully analyzing the target school as well as reviewing the information literature, has determined that the use of a sweep program or mailer program, beneficial as they are, would be implementing an intervention without establishing an accounting procedure first, because of this, the writer would have to reject these alternatives. Other areas of the country such as Nevada and the Northwest has indicated that an accounting and monitoring system was essential prior to an intervention program. Carson City's five step system for attendance updates and part of Duckworth's four major procedures were essential to incorporate

into this procedure. The latter two steps are rejected because they are more appropriate to a follow-up procedure.

In arriving at a solution for the target school the writer believed each of the plans described had an accounting of student attendance; however, reviewing and investigating partial days absence becomes an arduous process. School A identifies student absences immediately but requires the full attention of an administrator who is devoting most of the day accounting for students on the discrepancies list. This procedure appeared to require a great deal of time and cost. Also, consideration must be given to the amount of classroom instruction time that is utilized by teachers to record and report attendance data at the start of each class.

The system used in School B also becomes costly in teacher and administrator time. This may be less costly than in School A only because the student population is much smaller. The number of students to be investigated appears to be small enough that one administrator can validate student absence within one or two days.

After critical analysis and review of alternatives, the most logical solution of the problem in attendance tracking at the target school was combining the better facets of the systems analyzed with computerization. New York City Board of Education indicated that a computerized absentee system is imperative in attacking absenteeism and reducing dropout initially (Heffez, 1981). By incorporating New York City's computerized system, attendance would be addressed immediately as recommended by the Cleveland Public Schools and DeJung and Duckworth. Preventing unexcused absences and selective cutting must first be substantiated.

At the target school this system can be achieved with the assistance of a Quality Circles Group. This writer will, as a facilitator, stimulate group critical thinking, ie., brainstorm initially for a set procedure and problem solving as the implementation progresses. Arriving at this outcome leadership style of participating will be employed.

Chapter III

Methodology

Resources

The implementation of the attendance procedure was to produce an accurate system of accounting of students. This procedure was executed with the existing personnel. Two attendance clerks share the duties of attendance. One clerk is responsible for the accounting of students in respect to excused and unexcused absences. This individual records excused absences from parents/guardians and accepts medical notes. The clerk enters the excused absences individually into a personal computer and produces a list of excused absences for all staff and instructors at the beginning of the next school day.

The second attendance clerk has the responsibility of scanning the bubble sheets and adjusting excused and unexcused absences in the computer for individual students. By district policy a student has three school days to validate an absence as excused. This

necessitates a need to adjust the student file so they will be current.

Materials necessary to accomplish these tasks are a personal computer (borrowed from the main office), a computerized scanning machine (available through the County offices) and appropriate software such as Dbase and Report Writer (also available from the County School Board). The initial cost was nil since the equipment and software was already available in the school system. Bubble sheets were printed from the Data Processing Department of the county since they already possess the individual class rosters for grading purposes.

The last aspect of resources was the use of a Quality Circles Team to evaluate the procedure, implementation and leadership effectiveness of this writer. The Quality Circles Team consisted of one administrator, four teachers and two clerical staff members. Meetings were scheduled on regular intervals at the end of the school day so instructional time was not interrupted.

Monitoring

The primary goal of this Practicum was the producing of an accurate accounting system to monitor the absenteeism of the student population. This writer monitored and analyzed the procedure and reports on a daily and weekly basis and served as intermediary between the attendance office, instructional staff and Quality Circles Team. With the implementation of an accurate system of attendance a decrease in the absentee rate was also produced. This monitoring system also produced supplemental reports to expedite additional procedures such as State Attendance Reports and data pertaining to the new Florida Driver's License Attendance Law.

As stated in the Purpose of the practicum the target school reported a 16 percent absentee rate based on data that they had collected. The design of an accountability procedure that was more accurate and produced in a shorter time frame, should reduce the absentee rate and enable identification of students requiring some form of intervention.

In weeks one and two, the writer assembled the Quality Circles Team to familiarize them with the

attendance procedure and to lead discussions to finalize particulars of the implementation. It was important at this time to utilize additional components of critical thinking skills namely brainstorming, problem-finding, fact-finding and acceptance-finding strategies to avoid potential obstacles, such as computers, roster preparations and inservicing, prior to the actual implementation. Also, the writer detailed the new attendance procedure to the faculty at a school meeting. A procedure of using a scanner type bubble sheet (See Appendix B) for the accounting of students in all classes would decrease the administrator's time and cost. In each class the teacher records only those students on the list who are absent, limiting loss of instruction time. At the end of the school day each list was scanned and the information was entered into the computer system. The next day a report was generated detailing the previous day's absenteeism. Students must also obtain an admit slip (See Appendix C) to enter class after being absent. Thus, within a day an administrator can scrutinize the report detailing students who are absent

for the entire day, students who were late and students who were absent from selective classes.

This procedure makes information available the next school day without excessive cost and without a large amount of time lost by the classroom teachers and the administrators. By expediting the evaluation and investigation of absences, action can be taken sooner to reduce high absenteeism rates. This will enable the administrator to counsel a student prior to "failure due to absence". The Quality Circles Team accepted this procedure and the faculty members received a copy of the bubble sheets to be used, admit slips and a time table for the procedure. It was emphasized to the faculty that the use of bubble sheets would minimize loss of instructional time and still produce an accurate accounting system.

The actual implementation of the new procedure was in week three. Each teacher received a folder of bubble sheets with instructions to bubble in only students who were absent. This procedure was based on the end of the period attendance since state law stipulates that if a student is tardy he is not absent. The writer explained to the faculty, attendance can be

taken anytime during the class but must be adjusted at the end of class. First period attendance sheets were sent to the attendance office at the beginning of second period, this is necessary so first period can be scanned during second period to provide absentee information for administrators or parent inquiries. The remaining attendance sheets were scanned at the conclusion of the school day.

The following morning the bubble sheets, which encompass a two week period of time, are returned to the appropriate classroom teacher's mailbox prior to school with a list of students who have verified a parent, doctor or administrative excuse for the previous day or days.

In weeks four and five the writer worked with the attendance clerical staff to analyze the procedure and reports. As previously stated a student has three school days to verify an excused absence. On the fourth day a list is compiled of unexcused days for appropriate disciplinary action by an administrator.

At this point of time during the six week the Quality Circles Team was assembled to assess the progress of the attendance system. The writer

presented data collected and the Quality Circles Team brainstormed by using fact-finding strategy to analyze the data and arrive at an accurate calculating method which indicated that the absentee rate was documented at nine percent. This was calculated by tabulating the total number of periods of student absences divided by the total number of students times the number of days school was in session times seven, the number of periods in a school day. During this meeting the writer related that a minor problem had surfaced regarding students presenting parent/guardian notes excusing days of absence resulting in lost instructional time. This writer and the group brainstormed this situation to arrive at an improved solution. The Quality Circles Team and writer altered the excused policy by accepting phone excuses from parent/guardian instead of notes. This would alleviate the need for students to personally deliver parent/guardian notes thus reducing out-of-class time. This was accomplished by notifying parent/guardian with a memo sent home with the students. A two week period of time was used before the new phone excuse-only policy was implemented. However, a written note will still be

accepted for medical excuses or if it is documented in the student's records that the family does not have access to a home phone.

During weeks seven and eight the writer continued to monitor the procedures and also to implement the phone recommendation. Also, random phone calls were instituted to parent/guardian to document student absences. This procedure served as an audit of records and served as a communication line with parent/guardian demonstrating the school's concern for individual students.

In week nine, half way into the semester, the Quality Circles Team assembled again to review data. Again using fact-finding strategy the student absentee rate was calculated at seven percent of the student body. It was determined at this point that the system was on target and no major changes were necessary. The phone-only excuse procedure now implemented was monitored by the writer during weeks 10 and 11.

The Quality Circles Team in week 12 met to evaluate the tracking system, by incorporating brainstorming and fact-finding strategies to verify the accuracy of the data, and the effectiveness of the

leadership of this writer. The system continued to operate efficiently and no adjustments were necessary. The team appraised this writer by means of a leadership evaluation survey. Results of the survey will be summarized in Chapter IV.

The writer will continue to monitor and evaluate the attendance system in weeks 13 to 18 and prepare end of semester data to be evaluated by administrators to construct an intervention for needed students.

Evaluation

In assessing the attendance procedures system the absentee rate at the target school had fallen to an acceptable rate of 8.5 percent of students who missed one period or more per day, which means 91.5 percent did not average one period missed per day. Tracking individual students has proved to be a worthwhile project. As stated earlier, once an accurate tracking system can be achieved then the emphasis toward adopting intervention and prevention strategies can be addressed to assist students with absentee problems, thus preventing possible future dropouts.

The absentee rate as mentioned earlier in this chapter was calculated by taking the total number of periods absent (excused and unexcused) divided by the total number of students times the total number of school days times the number of periods in a school day was for the semester:

WEEK 1 - 16%

WEEK 6 - 9%

WEEK 9 - 7%

WEEK 18 - 6.1% (Figure 1)

Finalizing the tracking system presented the opportunity to analyze the data and look at other aspects of absenteeism. It must first be noted that final statistics are based on 1455 students (Figure 2). This figure was arrived at by taking the number of students who attended classes for the entire semester or for all 91 days. This was necessary since the target school is situated in a highly transient area. The 6.1 percent figure is the average absentee rate of 1455 students but more significant is the figure that 91.5 percent missed less than one period per day (excused or unexcused). This was arrived at by calculating the total number of students who missed one

period or less over a 91 day semester (1331 students out of 1455 students missed one or less periods).

By producing an accurate and up-to-date computerized accounting system other data reports can be produced to analyze and to pinpoint areas where students need assistance. Examples of this are Figure 3 which analyzes excused and unexcused absences by grade and sex and Figure 4 which details unexcused absences by periods. Additional charts depict total unexcused absences by grade and race (Figure 5) as well as the average unexcused absences by grade and race. One final example depicts the percentage of total absences (Figure 6), excused and unexcused, by grade. This graph clearly indicates a strong need for an intervention for grade nine students who account for 34 percent of all unexcused absences.

General comments pertaining to the graphs accumulated from the daily absentee records of the target school for the entire semester follows:

Figure 1 - A break down by grade of the total absentee rate of 6.1 percent indicating grades 9 and 12 posses the highest rate. Also, the percentage of unexcused

absences highlights the high percentage of 9th grade students who are in need of selected intervention to avoid these students becoming dropouts.

Figure 2 - A chart of student distribution by race for references in analyzing Figure 6.

Figure 3 - Compares male and female students by grade. This graph indicates the need of intervention relative to the excessive number of excused absences for females.

Figure 4 - Denotes the unexcused absences by period indicating students arriving late missed 1st period and left early before 7th period.

Figure 5 - Examines the absenteeism by race in the target school.

Figure 6 - Percentage of total absences by grade indicates that 34 percent of all unexcused absences by 9th grade students as compared to 19 percent by 12th grade students.

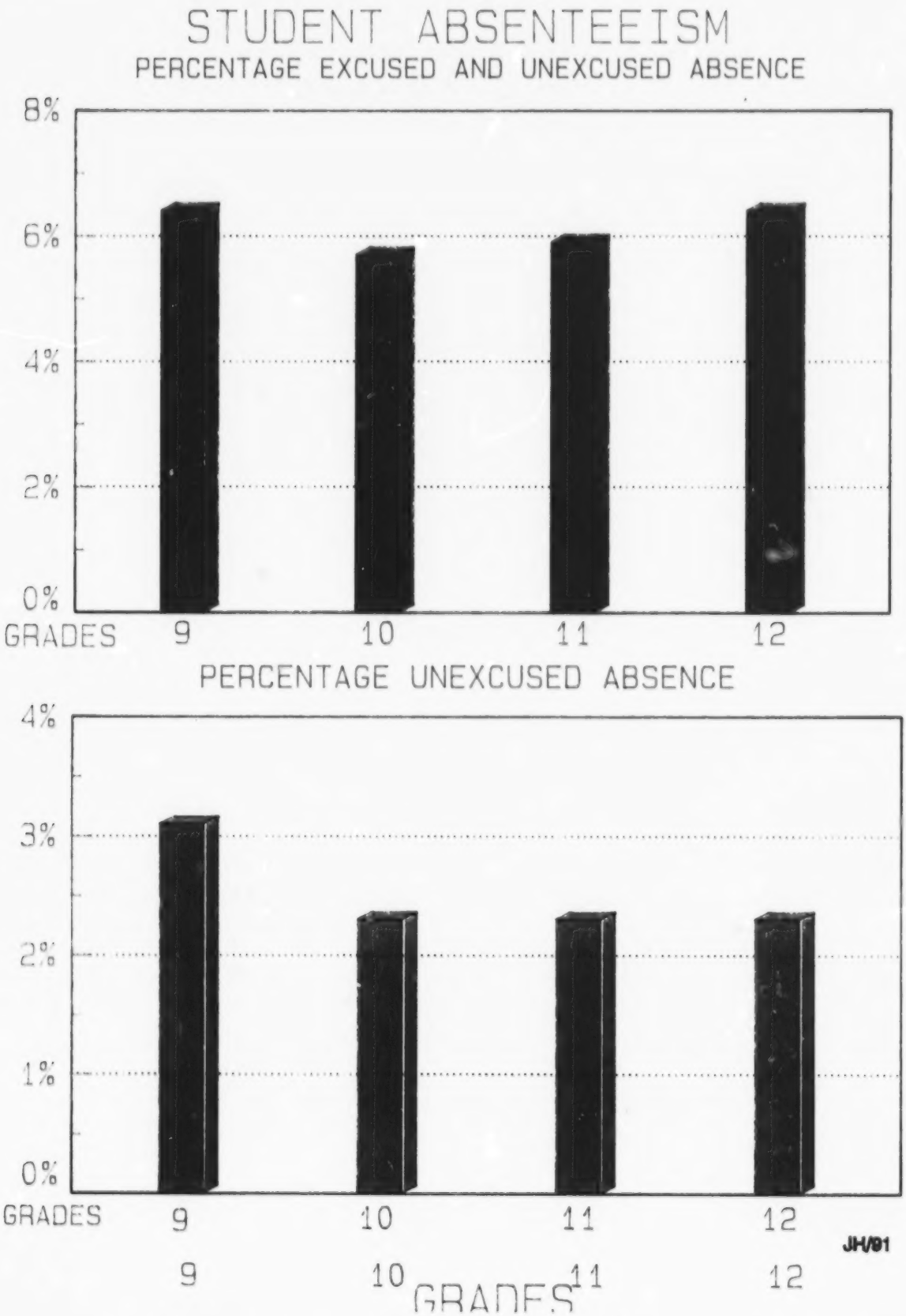
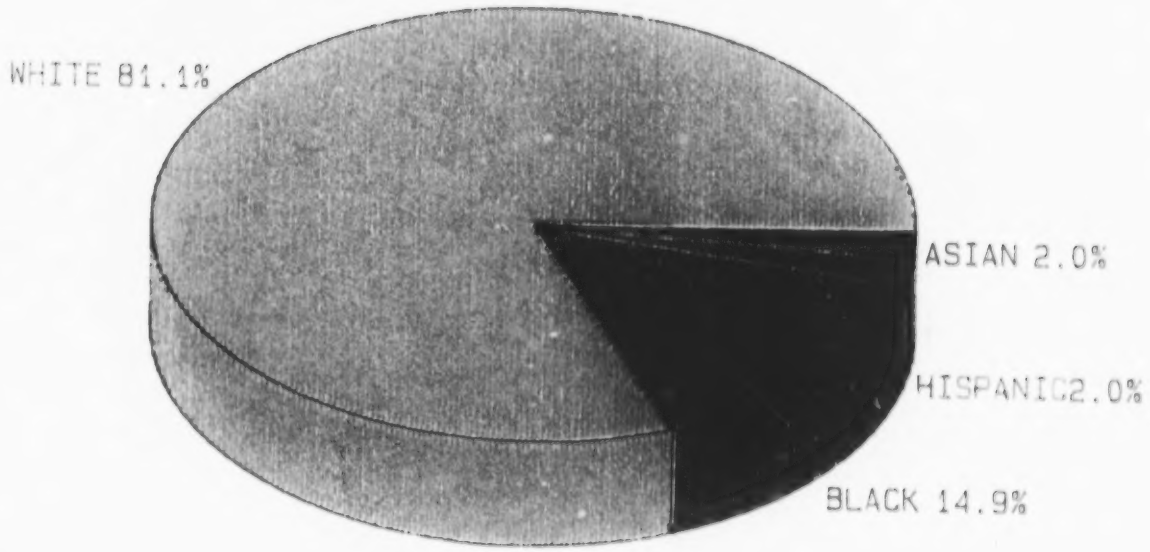

STUDENT ABSENTEEISM
PERCENTAGE EXCUSED AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCE
8%
6%
4%
2%
0%
GRADES 9 10 11 12
PERCENTAGE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE
4%
3%
2%
1%
0%
GRADES 9 10 11 12
JH/81
9 10 GRADES 11 12

FIGURE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS
BY RACE



NO. OF STUDENTS	
WHITE	1186
BLACK	216
HISPANIC	26
ASIAN	27
TOTAL	1455

JLH/91

FIGURE 2

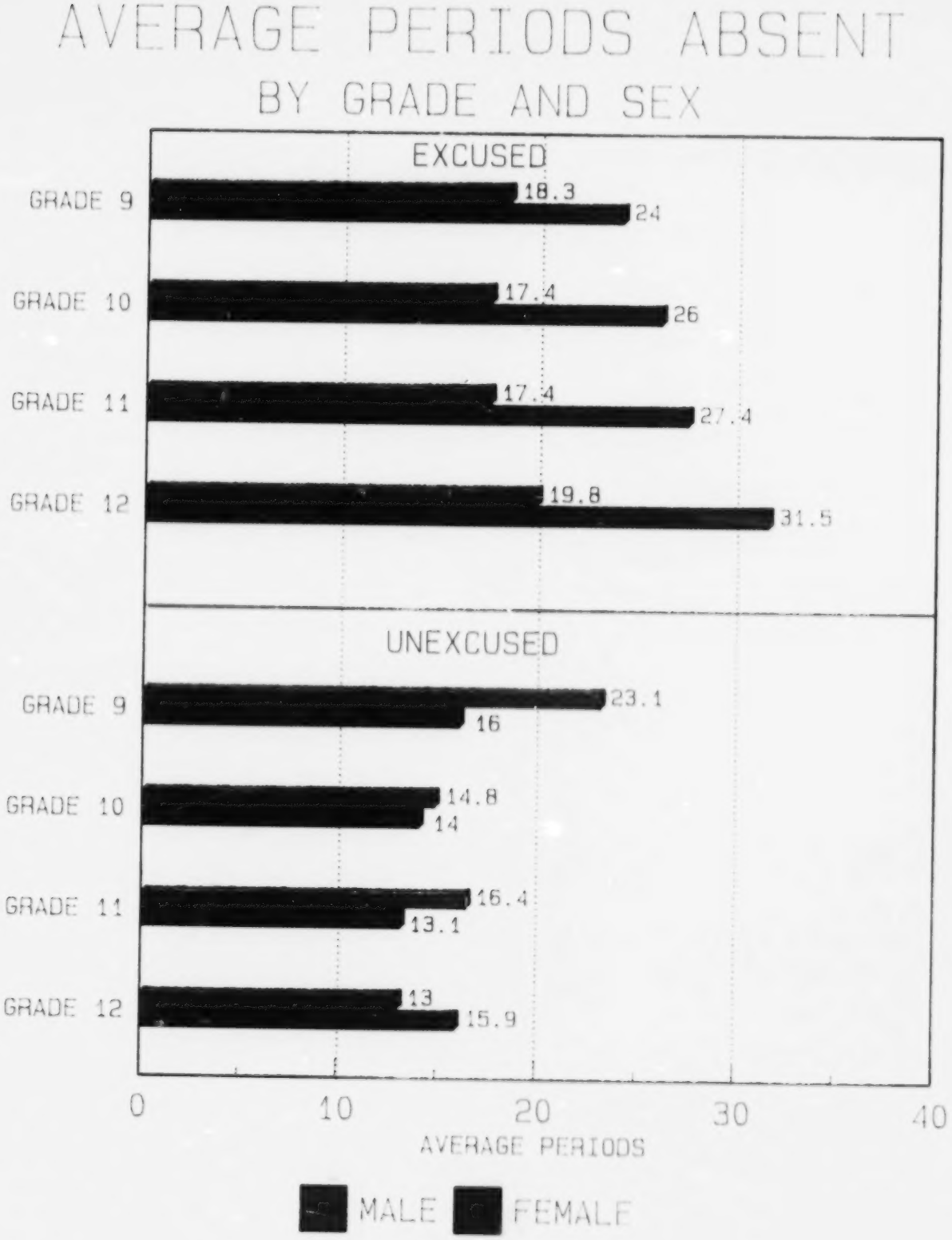
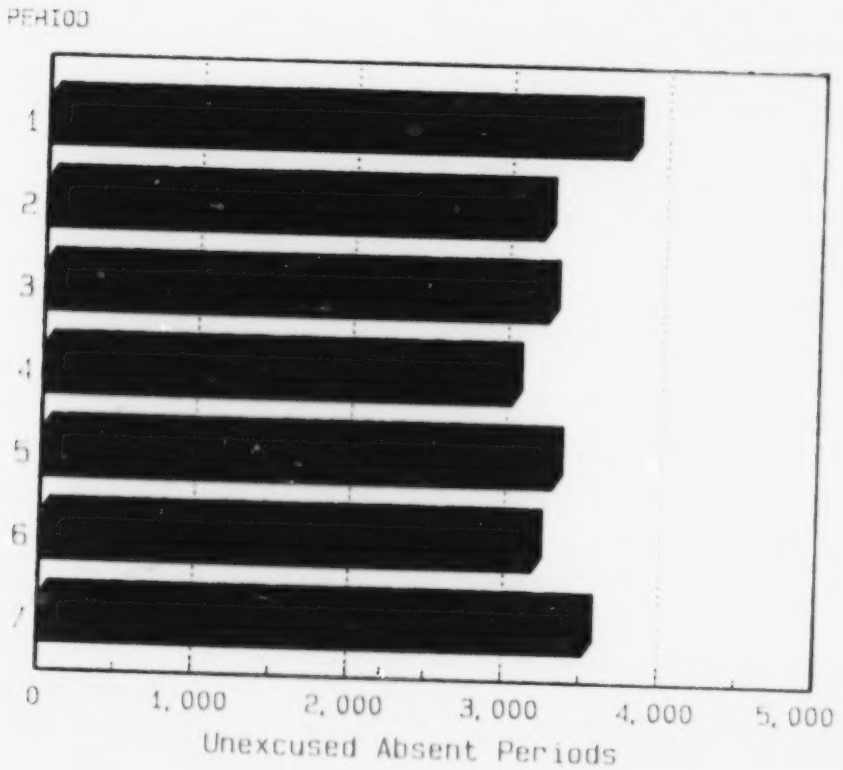

AVERAGE PERIODS ABSENT
BY GRADE AND SEX
EXCUSED
GRADE 9
18.3
24
GRADE 10
17.4
26
GRADE 11
17.4
27.4
GRADE 12
19.8
31.5
UNEXCUSED
GRADE 9
23.1
16
GRADE 10
14.8
14
GRADE 11
16.4
13.1
GRADE 12
13
15.9
0
10
20
30
40
AVERAGE PERIODS
MALE
FEMALE

Figure 3

UNEXCUSED ABSENCE BY PERIOD

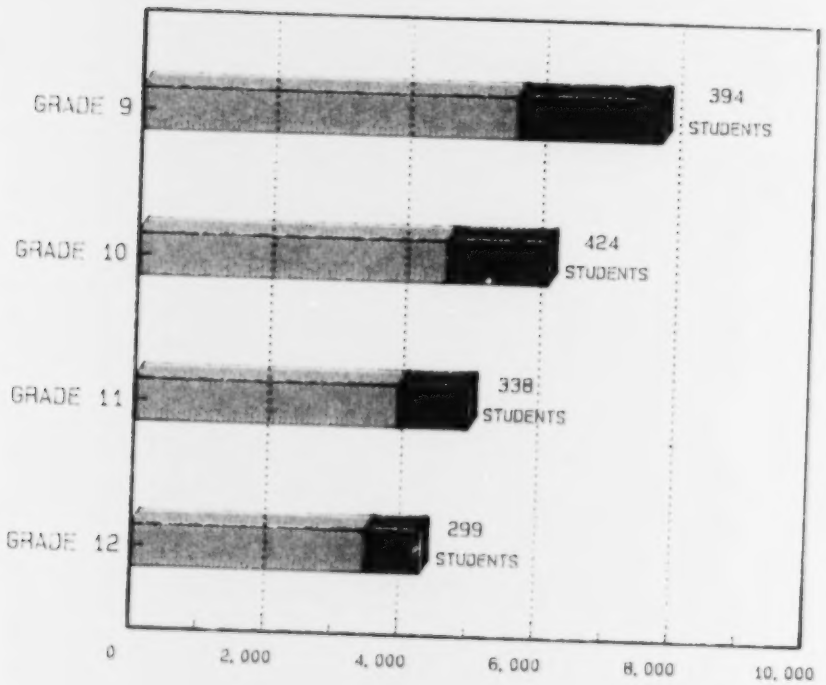
ALL GRADES



JLH/91

Figure 4

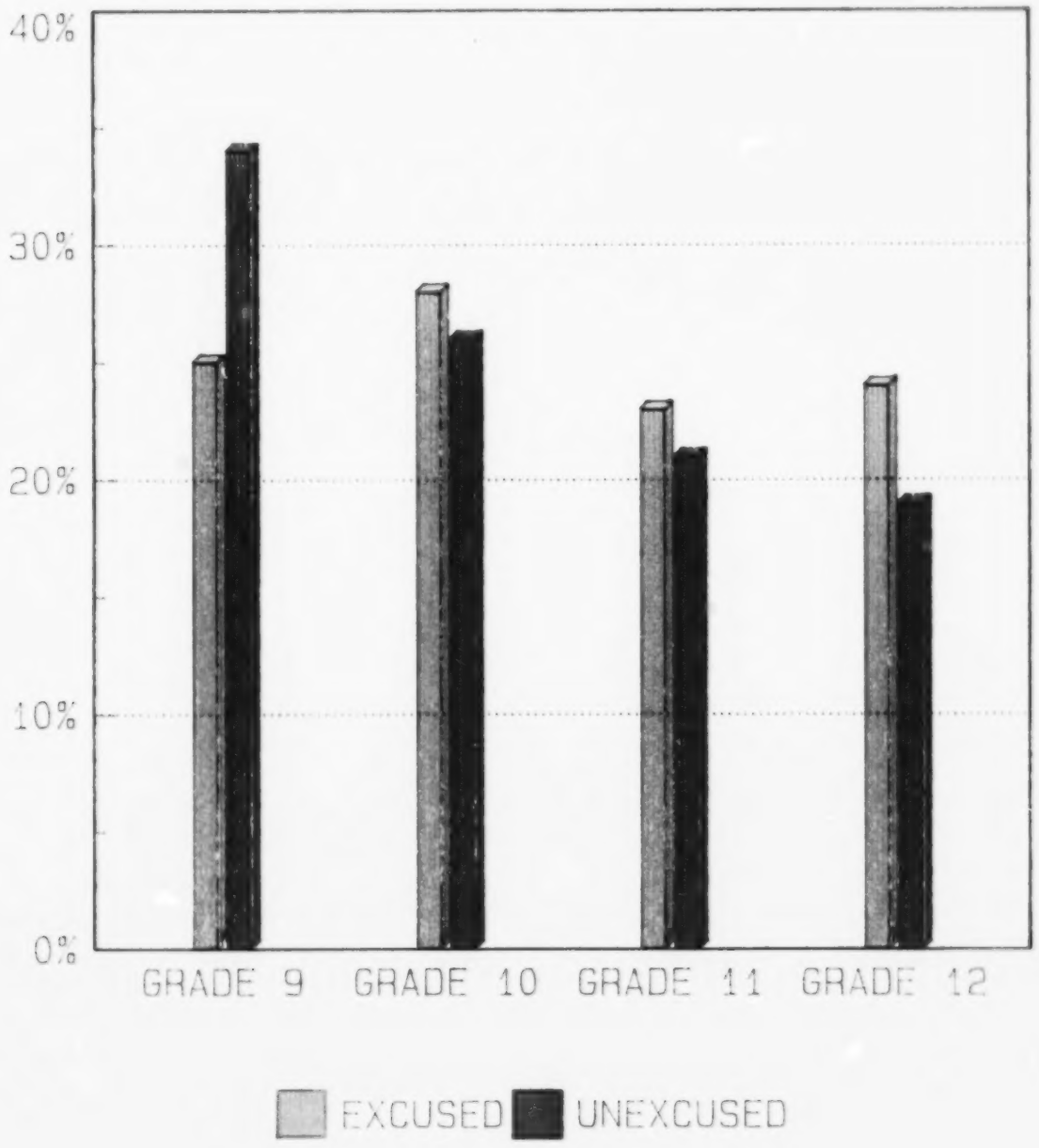
UNEXCUSED ABSENCE
BY GRADE AND RACE



JLH/91

FIGURE 5

PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL ABSENCE
BY GRADE



JLH/91

Figure 6

Chapter IV

Results

Referring back to the discrepancy statement, the major factor was that the target school needed an immediate and effective accounting system and means of evaluating the student attendance patterns. The lack of tracking students' attendance accurately and on a timely basis accounted for a 16 percent absentee rate. After implementing the current accounting system with the use of a computer and a scanning machine it was verified that the total daily absentee rate for the semester was reduced from 16 percent to 6.1 percent. This reduction of almost 10 percent fully satisfied objective one of this Practicum.

Objective two alluded to the use of critical thinking strategies by the writer in acting as a facilitator with the Quality Circles Team. This writer feels these strategies were exhibited throughout the implementation and exceeded the criteria of objective two. One example of this was in week one when the writer acting as facilitator explained the procedure to

the Quality Circles Team then used brainstorming to encourage the team to generate suggestions of potential obstacles (problem finding, page 27) that could be avoided. In this discussion the writer stressed the quantity of ideas so the system was thoroughly detailed. It was also stressed that the procedure would be judged later and not at the point of our implementation. The Quality Circles Team and writer developed a plan of action and proceeded forward.

Another example of critical thinking occurred in week six in which the Quality Circles Group addressed the minor problem of students losing class time to deliver excused notes to the attendance office. With the writer acting as facilitator the group brainstormed (page 28) the problem to develop a solution. In evaluating different alternatives the group selected the use of phone excuses to alleviate the loss of instruction time.

Fact-finding strategy was incorporated in the gathering of data to evaluate the success of the accounting procedure. In weeks 6 (page 27), nine (page 29) and twelve (page 29) data was accumulated and

presented to the Quality Circles Team to evaluate and assess the procedure.

Objective three encompassed the leadership style of the writer which proved to be a positive growth experience for this writer. Referring to Appendix B, Leadership Evaluation Rating Summary indicates the Quality Circles Team rated the writer above a three in all statements with an overall average of 4.2 on a scale of 5 (Figure 7) greatly surpassing the rating from objective three.

As a result of a more efficient and accurate system for the collection of data, it became possible to present graphic analysis of attendance patterns. Assumptions can be made and a plan of action developed to reduce absenteeism and dropout rates. Continued data collection and graphic analysis will enable the administrators enhanced monitoring of attendance. This practicum has been a worthwhile project and experience for this writer both because it greatly exceeded the criteria for success and was a valuable step forward for the target school.

LEADERSHIP EVALUATION
Rating Summary

Quality Circle Member	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	Total	Avg
Adaptability	4	4	4	3	4	4	23	3.8
Communicative Skills	5	5	4	5	4	5	28	4.6
Decision Making	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	4.0
Effectiveness in dealing with people	5	4	5	4	5	4	27	4.5
Initiative	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	4.0
Knowledge	5	5	5	4	4	4	27	4.5

5. Exceptional
4. Good
3. Satisfactory
2. Poor
1. Unsatisfactory

Overall Avg. Rating = 4.2

JUH/91

Figure 7

Chapter V

Recommendations

Once an efficient and current procedure for accounting of students has been instituted then a system of correcting and preventing subsequent and habitual absenteeism can be undertaken. Accounting for students is only the first phase to solving this chronic and universal problem. A follow-up system to identify and assist students to attend class and to remain in school is necessary. This could be accomplished by selecting a target group of tenth grade students with a past record of high absenteeism in order to classify common traits or indicators that could be used to identify potential truant or dropout individuals.

This writer will continue to work with the target school to develop and refine the program on a continual basis. Statistical data must be compiled over a lengthy period of time in order to evaluate the results for early detection and involvement with attendance problems. Additional follow-up may require

identification of various causes of absenteeism or tardiness with suggested plans of action based upon the commonality of problems. A documented success ratio will encourage other school systems to utilize this program.

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Appendix A

Leadership Effectiveness Evaluation

LEADERSHIP EVALUATION

Directions: Read each statement carefully. Circle the number which represents your response to each statement. Use the scale below to rate the following statements.

5 Exceptional
4 Good
3 Satisfactory
2 Poor
1 Unsatisfactory

1. ***ADAPTABILITY*** - Reaction to new responsibilities; handling of special projects; attitude; flexibility.

   5 4 3 2 1

2. ***COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS*** - Quality of reports and correspondence; listening ability, oral presentation; participation in discussions and meetings; methods used for flow in information.

   5 4 3 2 1

3. ***DECISION MAKING*** - Ability to make sound, logical decisions, functions effectively under pressure; exercise of good judgement; ability to see problems objectively.

   5 4 3 2 1

4. ***EFFECTIVENESS IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE*** - Cooperative interpersonal skills characterized by courteous, tactful and supportive behavior; ability to lead staff; ability to present ideas and get them accepted.

   5 4 3 2 1

5. ***INITIATIVE*** - Drive; self-starting ability; capacity to act promptly, a striving to attain goals; willingness to work beyond ordinary requirements; independent action.

   5 4 3 2 1

6. ***KNOWLEDGE*** - Amount of knowledge necessary to perform assigned duties and responsibilities and to accomplish stated objectives; specialized training.

   5 4 3 2 1

HANDOUT FROM CURRICULUM CLASS

Appendix B

Bubble Sheet

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NCS Trans-Optic® MP30-18265-3332

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM®

ATTENDANCE ROSTER
form no. 18265

52

PAGE NUMBER			
0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9

USE NO. 2 PENCIL ONLY

STUDENT INFORMATION

TEACHER'S SIGNATURE

WEEK OF:				
M	T	W	TH	F
A T	A T	A T	A T	A T

WEEK OF:				
M	T	W	TH	F
A T	A T	A T	A T	A T

59

Appendix C

Admit Slip

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ADMIT

NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (INTIAL)	DATE
DATE(S) OF ABSENCE	PERIOD(S) ABSENT

TIME: _____

AUTH: _____

TARDY		UNEXCUSED	PARENT	MEDICAL	ADMIN.
E	U				
			COUNTS ON DAYS		
			DOES NOT COUNT ON DAYS		

TEACHERS' SIGNATURE		
1	3	6
2	4	7
	5	